

What You Need to Know about Thirded Bread

Before our revolution, farms from New England to Georgia produced landrace grains brought from Europe, grains selected over centuries for flavor, resistance to drought and disease, and ability to make consistently good crops in poor soils. Farmers also quickly assimilated Native American corn selected for the same qualities into their grain farming as well. Thus corn, wheat, rye, and beans grew together—often in the same field—along with cane and pumpkins.

Rustic breads of mixed grain meals and flours formed an early American baking tradition. One early form of brown bread, called “Ryaninjun,” included equal parts or “thirds” of cornmeal, rye meal, and whole wheat flour mixed with water and stewed pumpkin for sweetening. Ryaninjun was a crude yeasted bread, served with beans in both the North and South.

After our revolution, pearlash-leavened thirded bread became popular throughout the colonies, particularly one known today as “Boston Brown Bread.” Since that time its fundamental elements have not changed: rye meal, corn meal, and graham flour mixed with water—later milk—and molasses and baked in a mold. There are hundreds of variations on classic thirded bread, but the basic elements of rye, wheat, corn, cane, and pumpkin appear in different iterations throughout the vast scape of recipes over the last four centuries.